



Morning Alert - Tuesday, September 19, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that senior members of the ruling parties met last night and agreed to unite ahead of the upcoming general election in order to maintain a stable government. Most commercial networks led with reports that former LDP lawmaker Mayuko Toyota held a press conference on Sunday and apologized to her supporters for abusing her secretary and expressed hope to run in the upcoming general election.

Most national dailies led with Prime Minister Abe's intention to dissolve the House of Representatives on Sept. 28 for a snap election on Oct. 22.

POLITICS

Abe likely to hold snap election on Oct. 22

All Monday and Tuesday morning papers reported that Prime Minister Abe has decided to dissolve the Lower House at the beginning of the extraordinary Diet session on Sept. 28 and probably hold a general election on Oct. 22 after 12 days of campaigning. Abe has already conveyed his decision to Komeito leader Yamaguchi and other senior ruling officials. Mainichi said the premier has decided that in light of the recent improvement in cabinet support, it would be wise to dissolve the chamber before any progress is made in election cooperation by the Democratic Party and other opposition parties or moves to form a new party by Tokyo Governor Koike's associates. Asahi wrote that Abe also thinks it would be best to dissolve the house before opposition parties resume grilling him on the Moritomo and Kake Gakuen scandals at the parliament.

Nikkei wrote that Abe is placing priority on maintaining his grip on power, explaining that this is a good time to dissolve the Lower House because the DP has been weakened by a series of

lawmaker defections. The paper added, however, that the premier will not be able to avoid criticism over the lack of a strong justification for holding an election at this time. Mainichi speculated that the premier will be criticized for creating a political vacuum amid North Korea's repeated nuclear tests and missile launches. Noting that President Trump is expected to visit Japan in early November, the paper quoted a senior GOJ official as saying that since the North Korea issue is becoming prolonged, the prime minister decided to dissolve the chamber at an early date to cement his government's base.

Consumption tax, North Korea, constitutional revision to become major campaign issues

Today's papers said Abe plans to run an election campaign on the platform of raising the consumption tax to ensure a stable social security system for "all generations," continuing to put pressure on North Korea, and making the existence of the SDF explicit in the Constitution. According to the dailies, Abe is expected to ask the public to support his policy of using the tax revenue generated from raising the consumption tax from 8% to 10% in October 2019 to make secondary and higher education free for certain students. Asahi voiced doubts about the premier's plan to focus on the consumption tax, speculating that he is desperate to deflect public criticism of his handling of the Moritomo and Kake Gakuen scandals.

As for constitutional amendment, Yomiuri explained that by winning the general election, Abe is hoping to persuade Komeito to support his intention to revise Article 9, given that the junior ruling partner has raised doubts about the premier's goal of revising the war-renouncing provision in 2020 in view of the apparent loss of public trust in the Abe administration in the early summer.

New conservative party to be launched this month

All papers wrote today that former Environment Minister Hosono, who bolted the Democratic Party last month, has decided to form a new opposition party with independent parliamentarian Wakasa, who is very close to popular Tokyo Governor Koike, ahead of the planned dissolution of the Lower House on Sept. 28. Some 10 Diet members, mostly DP defectors, are likely to join the new political group which aims to galvanize centrist voters who are not necessarily satisfied with the Abe administration. The two Diet members will decide on the official party name and policy platform quickly to prepare for the looming general election.

Poll points to restoration of public confidence in Abe

Tuesday's Sankei published the results of its latest public opinion survey that put support for the Abe cabinet at 50.3%, up 6.5 points from a month ago, and nonsupport at 40 percent, down 9 points. The paper conjectured that the premier has decided to call a snap election at an early date because a number of opinion polls conducted recently by major news outlets have showed a considerable increase in public support for the administration.

INTERNATIONAL

Abe calls dialogue with DPRK “dead end”

Most papers reported today on an op-ed piece written for the New York Times by Prime Minister Abe, who urged the international community to ratchet up the pressure on North Korea in the belief that “prioritizing diplomacy and emphasizing the importance of dialogue will not work with North Korea.” The premier insisted that given North Korea’s repeated breaches of its previous commitments with the international community on denuclearization and its continuing missile launches and nuclear tests, “more dialogue with North Korea would be a dead end.”

Japan, ROK both conduct joint air drills with U.S. military

All dailies took up separate joint air drills conducted on Monday between the U.S. military and the ASDF and the South Korea air force, noting that a fleet of B-1 bombers and F-35 fighters flew close to the border between the South and the North in an apparent display of force to counter North Korea’s relentless provocations. The articles projected that the Kim regime is bound to react sharply and take counteractions, such as another ballistic missile launch.

In a related story, Asahi claimed that the 7th Fleet strike group led by the USS Ronald Reagan will be deployed in waters near the Korean Peninsula next month, noting that the move is likely to escalate the tension there. It added that the U.S., Japan, and South Korea are planning to conduct a trilateral missile defense drill in late September.

Japan, U.S., India agree to enhance pressure on North Korea

All papers wrote today that Foreign Minister Kono held talks with Secretary Tillerson and his Indian counterpart in New York on Monday and agreed to urge UN member states to fully enforce relevant Security Council resolutions on North Korea. In the second trilateral foreign ministerial session of its kind, the three officials also affirmed the importance of promoting freedom of navigation and the rule of law with China’s maritime push in the South and East China Seas in mind.

North Korea shows it is capable of striking Guam

All Saturday morning papers reported heavily on North Korea’s launch on Friday of a ballistic missile that flew over Hokkaido and traveled about 3,700 km, reaching an altitude of 800 km before landing in the Pacific Ocean about 2,200 km off Cape Erimo. The papers said North Korea issued a warning to the U.S. by demonstrating its capability to strike Guam because the U.S. is increasing its pressure on the North. Sankei wrote that the U.S., Japan, and South Korea believe that the missile was a Hwasong-12 intermediate-range ballistic missile. According to Yomiuri, Prime Minister Abe and ROK President Moon spoke by phone on Friday evening and agreed to work closely to increase pressure on the North. The premier also later met at the Kantei with U.S. Army Chief of Staff Mark Milley and confirmed the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Foreign Minister Kono also held teleconferences with his colleagues in the U.S., South Korea, and Russia, during which they agreed to strengthen cooperation.

UNSC releases press statement condemning North Korea

All Saturday papers wrote that the UN Security Council held an emergency meeting at the UN headquarters on Friday following the ballistic missile launch by North Korea that came only three days after the new sanctions resolution was adopted. The council released a press statement condemning the missile launch as “extremely provocative.” Asahi wrote that although the U.S. and Japan are calling for further strengthening sanctions against the North, there are no prospects in sight for stopping North Korea’s provocations. The paper said the positions of the U.S., which thinks more pressure is necessary, and China, which is concerned that the Kim regime will become unstable and favors dialogue, are fundamentally different in terms of their attitudes toward sanctions and how to resolve the issue. The daily said the U.S. believes that UNSC resolutions alone will not resolve the issue and is planning to step up the pressure by also imposing unilateral sanctions against Chinese and Russian companies that are supporting North Korea. Nikkei also wrote that since discussions at the UNSC appear to be in a stalemate, the U.S. is set to increase diplomatic pressure at such venues as the UN General Assembly.

U.S., Japan, South Korea to hold summit on Sept. 21

Saturday evening’s Mainichi wrote that National Security Advisor McMaster announced on Friday that Prime Minister Abe, President Trump, and South Korean President Moon will meet on Sept. 21 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting in New York. The leaders are expected to discuss measures to deal with North Korea in response to its sixth nuclear test and latest ballistic missile launch. According to the daily, the leaders will meet at a luncheon hosted by President Trump for their second trilateral summit. McMaster reportedly told the press: “North Korea remains one of the world’s most urgent and dangerous security problems.”

U.S., North Korea enter “cold war era”

Saturday morning’s Sankei wrote that the latest ballistic missile launch by North Korea made the Trump administration realize the limitations of the strategy of imposing “peaceful pressure” on North Korea, which has no intention to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile development programs. The paper claimed that the U.S. and North Korea have entered a “cold war era” as North Korea continues to build up its nuclear capabilities. The daily wrote that although North Korea’s possession of nuclear weapons is becoming an inescapable fact, the Trump administration will not easily give up on its position of not acknowledging North Korea as a nuclear power. However, since it has become clear that it will be extremely difficult to bring North Korea to the negotiating table through the current “peaceful pressure” tactics, the U.S. administration is quietly shifting to the “next step.” The daily explained that the U.S. administration is planning to “deter, pressure, and contain” North Korea, just like it did with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The paper added that the U.S. will use all available military, diplomatic, and economic means, excluding preemptive military strikes, to put pressure on North Korea and force Kim Jong Un to give up on the idea of possessing nuclear weapons. The paper said that unless North Korea clearly announces its intention to denuclearize in a concrete manner, the U.S. will not guarantee the survival of the Kim regime. The daily said since

this strategy is an extension of current policies, the U.S. administration is likely to obtain public support for it, adding, however, that the situation in which North Korea poses a threat to the U.S., Japan, and South Korea is likely to continue.

Majority of U.S. public support military action against North

Sunday's Sankei reported on the results of a Gallup poll released on Friday showing that 58% of the American people support military action against North Korea if the U.S. cannot resolve the North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile issue through peaceful means. The paper said the results of the same poll in 2003 showed that 47% of the public supported military action against Pyongyang. The poll was conducted by holding telephone interviews with 1,022 people from Sept. 6 to 10.

Kuwait to expel North Korean ambassador

Monday's Yomiuri reported that Kuwaiti media reported on Sunday that the government of Kuwait has decided to expel the North Korean ambassador to the nation. The paper said the measure was taken in response to U.S. calls for nations to suspend diplomatic relations with North Korea. The North Korean ambassador is expected to leave Kuwait by the end of this month.

San Francisco City Assembly to vote on establishment of "Comfort Women Day"

Sunday morning's Sankei reported from Los Angeles that the San Francisco City Assembly will discuss on Sept. 19 a resolution to designate Sept. 22 as "Comfort Women Day," saying that the assembly is expected to vote on the resolution on the same day. The paper wrote that Sept. 22 marks the second anniversary of the city assembly's approval of a resolution to establish a "comfort women" memorial. According to the daily, the memorial will be unveiled at St. Mary's Square in Chinatown on Sept. 22. The paper said if the resolution is enacted, anti-Japanese movements could become more common.

Foreign Minister Kono criticizes Tokyo Shimbun

Sunday's Sankei reported that Foreign Minister Kono heavily criticized Tokyo Shimbun on his blog on Saturday over the paper's reporting on nuclear disarmament. According to the paper, Tokyo Shimbun criticized the fact that an annual speech by a Japanese high school student at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament was called off this year. Tokyo Shimbun reportedly linked this with the GOJ's decision not to join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons adopted at the UN in July. Kono rebutted by saying that "some nations were against having a high school student deliver a speech at the conference on disarmament that is operated based on the consensus of all members" and explained that the high school student will be given a different opportunity to express his or her view. He blasted Tokyo Shimbun by calling its criticism a "bullet in the back" and saying it is "using nuclear disarmament for political purposes."

SECURITY

MOD gives up on Mageshima as site for U.S. aircraft training

Sunday's Sankei reported that the Ministry of Defense will select an alternative to Mageshima Island as a site for the U.S. military's field carrier landing practice. The ministry's negotiations to purchase the land on Mageshima from the development company that owns most of the island have reportedly stalled. The paper said an alternative site is likely to be selected in Kyushu or Shikoku, adding that once a site has been selected, the negotiations over Mageshima will be terminated.

Missile interceptors to be installed in Hokkaido

Most Tuesday papers reported that the Defense Ministry has decided to install PAC-3 batteries at a GSDF camp in Hakodate, Hokkaido, in order to prepare for the possibility of another ballistic missile launch by North Korea.

U.S. Navy relieves two commanders in connection with collisions at sea

Mainichi reported on Tuesday that the U.S. Navy has dismissed two senior commanders in the Pacific region in connection with the recent deadly collisions involving Navy ships, noting that Rear Adm. Charles Williams, the commander of Task Force 70, and Capt. Jeffrey Bennett, the commander of Destroyer Squadron 15, were removed from their posts due to a "loss of confidence" in their ability to command.

Senior LDP member calls for discussions on possible review of three non-nuclear principles

Monday's Sankei reported that Executive Acting Secretary General of the LDP Hagiuda appeared on Fuji-TV's "Shin Hodo 2001" on Sunday and said that the three non-nuclear principles "are an important national policy and must be protected." At the same time, Hagiuda reportedly expressed his understanding for holding discussions on whether the principles need to be reviewed or not by saying: "Can we protect the lives and property of the people of Japan at all costs by continuing to adhere to the principles? It is a pity that some refuse to hold discussions on the principles based on reality."

U.S. mulls asking Japan to defend "first island chain"

Sunday's Mainichi wrote that former Chief of Staff of the GSDF Iwata disclosed at a symposium held in Washington on Friday that the U.S. is mulling the idea of asking its allies, including Japan, to defend the "first island chain" connecting Okinawa, Taiwan, and the Philippines in the event that the U.S. becomes involved in a military conflict with China in the South or East China Sea. The daily said the U.S. forces would temporarily go to Guam in such an event.

U.S. vessels vulnerable to cyberattacks

Sunday's Mainichi reported that former MSDF Chief of Staff Takei said at a symposium in Washington on Friday that the U.S. Navy's Aegis-equipped vessels deployed around Japan in response to North Korea's ballistic missile launches are vulnerable to cyberattacks. He reportedly said: "It is already being accepted as a real threat within the U.S. Navy." Takei reportedly explained that since U.S. Aegis ships use communication satellites for navigation, they could be targeted for

cyberattacks via the satellites. Takei added that if the destinations of the Aegis ships are remotely controlled, the U.S. Navy ships could diverge from their original routes.

ECONOMY

Apple, Dell to join bid to buy Toshiba's chip unit

Saturday morning's Yomiuri reported that four major U.S. IT companies, including Apple and Dell, are expected to join the U.S.-Japan-South Korea consortium aiming to buy Toshiba's memory chip unit. The paper wrote that Bain Capital, which leads the consortium, presented the idea to Toshiba.

"TPP 11" chief negotiators to meet on Sept 21-22

Saturday morning's Mainichi and Yomiuri reported that TPP Minister Motegi announced on Friday that a meeting of chief negotiators of the 11 TPP nations will be held on Sept. 21-22 in Tokyo. Mainichi said the participants will discuss items that had been frozen or amended in response to strong demands from the U.S. before it withdrew from the TPP.

U.S. to begin investigation into titanium sponge imports from Japan

Saturday morning's Mainichi carried a Kyodo report saying that the U.S. Department of Commerce has announced that it will launch an investigation into allegations that Japanese-made titanium sponge is being exported to the U.S. at unreasonably low prices. The paper said if damage to domestic industry is confirmed, antidumping duties could be imposed.

SCIENCE

U.S. may remain in Paris Accord on climate change

Monday morning's Nikkei and Sankei reported that the Wall Street Journal reported on Saturday that a senior USG official announced at an international conference held on the same day that the U.S. intends to avoid withdrawing from the Paris Accord. According to the Wall Street Journal, a U.S. delegation led by Deputy Director on the National Economic Council Eissenstat hinted in a minister-level conference in Canada that the U.S. will remain in the Paris Accord if the U.S. greenhouse gas emissions targets are lowered. National Economic Council Director Cohn may also make a similar announcement at the conference. Nikkei also wrote that Secretary of State Tillerson said during an interview with CBS on Sunday that President Trump "is eyeing the possibility of remaining" in the pact and expressed the view that the U.S. may decide not to pull out of the Paris Accord under the right conditions.